



## MEDICAL SERVICES RENDERED BY DR. IDA SOPHIA SCUDDER TO WOMEN IN TAMIL NADU

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### Abstract

Dr. Ida S. Scudder was born on 9 December 1870 in India and she was a third-generation American Medical Missionary of American Arcot Mission. She dedicated her life to the difficulties of Indian women and the struggle against plague, cholera and leprosy. Ida started the medical work in the Mary Taber Schell hospital. The hospital was embodied with all the latest structural improvements and equipped with up-to date surgical appliances. In 1909 Ida started a nursing school with, Dr. Ida started a Medical College for women in 1918.

### Introduction

This paper makes an attempt to highlight the medical services rendered by the American Arcot Missionary Dr. Ids Sophia Scudder. In ancient time Tamil Society was ravaged by wars, annexations, superstitious beliefs, illiteracy and ignorance. Men dominated and suppressed the women in the society. Especially women were not permitted to appear in public. Muslim women led their life with in four walls and led a cruel life in those days. Because of their silence they could not receive education. During childbirth their husbands did not allow the male doctor to perform delivery. During pregnancy they were not given nutritious food. As a result either they lost their children or lost their life. Health status of women was worse in those days. In such a situation Ida Sophia Scudder, missionary of American Arcot Mission did commendable service to the women in Tamil Nadu.

### Dr. Ida S. Scudder

Dr. Ida S. Scudder was born on 9 December 1870 in India<sup>i</sup> and she was a third-generation American Medical Missionary of American Arcot Mission. She dedicated her life to remove the difficulties of Indian women and the struggle against plague, cholera and leprosy. In 1890 when she was with her mother in the mission bungalow at Tindivanam, she came to know a woman in childbirth died needlessly. During one night three different men, a Brahmin, a high-caste Hindu and a Muslim came pleading for her help during the childbirth of their wives. They refused the help of Ida's father because they were not willing to get treatment from a male physician.<sup>ii</sup> During the next day morning Ida came to know the death message of those three women. She could not able to bear the death of those three young girls. These incidents provoked her to be a medical missionary to serve the ignorant people. She went to America and joined at the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia in 1895. In 1898 she was transferred to the Cornell Medical College where she got her M.D degree.<sup>iii</sup> She returned to India with ten thousand dollar cheque for establishing a new hospital and was accompanied by Annie Hancock.<sup>iv</sup>

### Mary Taber Schell Hospital

When Dr. Ida Scudder returned to India her father died of cancer unexpectedly. This was a great shock to Ida and the people were not ready to get medical treatment from her. But she did her best efforts to treat the people who were in superstitious practices. During feast days people prohibited the medicine and moved from place to place to escape from evil spirits. On this situation she started a clinic at Vellore. She treated over 5,000 patients at the bungalow besides caring for a growing practice in the town. She made 177 professional visits to high caste homes. She met with many difficulties and discouragements because of the ignorance of people and their blind obedience to the laws of custom. These caused them to disobey the notions of healing the sick. The corner stone of the Mary Taber Schell Memorial Hospital was laid on 9 September 1901 and Ida started the medical work in the Mary Taber Schell hospital. The hospital was embodied with all the latest structural improvements and equipped with up-to date surgical appliances.<sup>v</sup> She was assisted by a trained native nurse and a compounder. Louisa H. Hart, Medical Officer of Arcot Mission and Ida served at Vellore with absolute dedication and the mission grew up. Lillian Hart and Ms. Dalia M. Houghton were the trained nurses and the later was in charge of the nursing department.

The natives were full of ignorance and superstition. In 1905 Ida Scudder said that "*My heart so often aches and yearns over these poor superstitious sufferers*". The missionaries reached out into the dark corners and the women came from villages five, ten and even 150 miles apart.<sup>vi</sup> In 1906 Dr. Ida and Dr. Hart started their work along the roadside. She had weekly trips to a small dispensary in a churchyard twenty-five miles away and found people all along the way who needed help and appointed stations where she would stop each week at the edge of the village, under a tamarind or banyan tree and gave treatment to all who wished to come. The motor car made a medical visit by taking a team of doctors, nurses, students, pharmacists, public health workers, a leprosy specialist and an evangelist.<sup>vii</sup>



Dr. Ida wrote to government asking for a grant of Rs. 25,000 to extend the hospital building. She said that the hospital was one thoroughly deserving support and had not hitherto been aided by government.<sup>viii</sup> The government granted 3,668 rupees in 1912, which was later used for the purchase of equipments as the hospital was not extended.<sup>ix</sup> In the maternity hospital regular diet was given from Oliver Mothers Mission fund, U.S.A donated liberally for the regular diet of the patients in the maternity hospital. This enabled patients to get admitted in the hospital a few days sooner in order to improve their health condition. To encourage the women patients to make use of the hospital they extended the allowances and free food. Milk, eggs, broth, gruels and bread were provided to the patients.<sup>x</sup> The doctors and nurses tried and adopted various methods to help the women to pay attention to their health at the right time.

In July 1914 Dr. Lilian Cook came from Scotland and entered into the ministry with enthusiasm, energy and skill. Ida and Lilian worked together and there was a tremendous increase in the number of patients. The verandahs as well as wards were filled with patients and in the wards that there had been a patient on the bed and one under it. The dispensaries were always busy.

As there was a growing demand for trained nurses the mission trained more pupils as nurses and compounders. One of the things the mission had hoped to do in the new hospital was to train more pupils in order to meet the growing demand for trained nurses and compounders. All the nurses had a part in the women's work in the evangelistic campaign. A matron was appointed for the nurses and the hospital. Her good influence on the nurses was felt at once. Her influence was also felt in the hospital, where she went to each new patient and talked to her, making her feel at home at once. Her work had been amongst the Muslims and especially she was a help among the Muslim patients as many of them cannot understand Tamil, and when she spoke to them in her fluent Hindustani they at once felt happier.<sup>xi</sup>

Eventhough the missionaries were busy in evangelical work the hospital work also increased along with. Ms. Annie appointed as nurse in the Gudiyattam dispensary, won the love of the people and had a busy dispensary every day. She directed the very serious cases to come on wednesday to see the doctor or she sent the cases to Mary Taber Schell hospital at Vellore. During wednesday morning the roadside work was very busy and the people shared their sadness and joyous experiences.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Nursing School**

In 1909 Ida started a small nursing school with the help of H.M.Houghton, who learned Tamil and started a regular course of training. The nursing school grew from fifteen nurses in 1909 to a higher-grade-training school. It was the first graduate school of nursing all over India, affiliated with Madras University giving a B.Sc degree. In 1921 the mission appointed Miss. Noodyk and she took charge of the maternity and operating wards. Noodyk and Miss. Houghton gave lectures to the medical students and helped in college work. In that year the result percentage of the medical school was 76.6 in the Madras Presidency. In July 1937 there were sixty eight nurses in training, seven post graduate, three Western and ten Indian staff nurses. The School of Pharmacy was also run by the Arcot Mission and one of its graduates went to Poona. The first compounder and nurse combined was Salome, whom Ida selected and she was a butler's wife. She was trained by Ida in the mission bungalow and she assisted Dr. Scudder in the dispensary work. Gnanammal was another trained Indian compounder from Palayamkottai. She was versatile in her talents, serving from time to time as midwife, matron and Bible-woman in addition to her special role as compounder.<sup>xiii</sup> More than 400 students were awarded nursing certificates in 1946 and it became the first graduate school of nursing in India. Dr. Ida became a lady with a lamp as, year after year on the evening of her nurses' graduation, she stood in the darkened chapel of the great medical center holding the little silver lamp and watched it kindle into flame.

### **Medical College for Women, Vellore**

Dr. Ida had an idea of starting a Medical College from the very beginning of her Medical Service. In 1911 the annual conference of the Medical Missionaries was held at Kodaikanal. The Missionaries felt that it was very difficult to get permission from the government to start a Medical College for Women. They struggled to find enough fund of rupees 9,00,000 estimated to be.<sup>xiv</sup> Dr. Ida was very busy in starting the college and so the hospital was under the charge of Dr. Pollard.

The year 1918 would ever stand out in the memory of the missionaries of American Arcot Mission as the most eventful year in the history of medical work for women in Southern India. The Medical College for Women was opened where some of the Indian sisters were trained to work the densely populated parts of India with ability to heal the terrible unalleviated sufferings of women and children. Schell Hospital welcomed these new young sisters which in her turn will develop and absorb her future years. A thrill of joy, satisfaction and thanks giving went through among the missionaries when Lord Pentland pronounced the Medical school for women opens. Colonel Bryson, the then Governor and others were inspiring in their words of encouragement and commendation. Ida was the first president of the college. It offered initially the Licentiate in



Medical Practice Course (L.M.P). The coming of the Medical school to Vellore was meant much extra work, but Ida was glad to launch this great and needed institution. Two adjoining bungalows were rented for the school, not far from Schell Hospital and Voorhees College. They started the medical school and hostel for the students in a rented building.<sup>xv</sup> The new and well equipped laboratories of Voorhees College had been put at the disposal of the school and the Chemistry classes were held there.<sup>xvi</sup>

Seventeen girls were admitted and among them fourteen were graduated in 1922. Six of them got prizes in the Madras Presidency and one won a gold medal in anatomy in competition with men from six medical schools.<sup>xvii</sup> In 1926 Ida wrote to the government to get permission to conduct medical examination in Vellore itself. She pointed out that the girls were unable to find suitable board and lodging in Madras. The Indian girls were to be nervous and perhaps did not themselves equal justice in Madras. The government allowed the principal to conduct the fourth year examination in the college at Vellore itself. Already the first, second and third year examinations were conducted in Vellore.<sup>xviii</sup> In the same year Ida applied to the government to sanction 7,600 rupees as a maintenance grant.<sup>xix</sup> In 1928 two hundred acres of land was purchased for the medical school campus at Bagayam, Vellore. In the same year Mahatma Gandhi visited the medical school. Ida travelled a number of times to the United States to raise the funds for the college and hospital. In 1945, the college was opened to men as well as women also.

### Conclusion

Thus, the medical services of the missionaries of American Arcot Mission were a remarkable and valued one. They were the first missionaries in Tamil Nadu to establish a Women's Medical College. They mainly concentrated on empowering women, eradicating the social evil of caste barrier and bringing out the Muslim Women to the society. The missionaries especially the women missionaries were given award by the Government of Madras for their selfless service. This kind of work was initiated by Ida Scudder who could establish medical college and nursing school for women. She dedicated her whole life for improving the health status of women in Tamil Nadu.

### End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Nina Miller, *Missionary Hero Stories*, New York, 1948, p.84 .

<sup>ii</sup> Geoffray Hanks, *To Great Christians into the Twentieth Century*, London, 1992, p.286.

<sup>iii</sup> Amitabh Singh, *Famous Missionaries in India*, New Delhi, 1977, p.76.

<sup>iv</sup> Annual Report of Women Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church in America, 1900, p. 27

<sup>v</sup> W. Francis, Frederick Nicholson & others, *Gazatteer of South India – Vol II*, New Delhi, 1988, p.19

<sup>vi</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Reformed Church in America, 1906, p.46

<sup>vii</sup> *The Legacy of Ida S. Scudder* (Article), International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Dorothy Clark Wilson.

<sup>viii</sup> G.O.No.112, Public Department, 29 January, 1912.

<sup>ix</sup> G.O.No.860, Public Department, 11 July, 1913.

<sup>x</sup> Annual Report of Arcot Mission, 1913, p.55 .

<sup>xi</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Reformed Church in America, 1916, pp.78- 79.

<sup>xii</sup> *Ibid*, 1919, p.p. 90-91.

<sup>xiii</sup> Mary Pauline Jeffrey, *Ida S. Scudder of Vellore*, Mysore, p.72

<sup>xiv</sup> Annual Report of the Board of Foreign Mission of the Reformed Church in America, 1915, p. 15

<sup>xv</sup> Government Order No. 674, dated 15 July, 1921.

<sup>xvi</sup> Mary Pauline Jeffrey, *op.cit*, p.74.

<sup>xvii</sup> *The Legacy of Ida S. Scudder* (Article), International Bulletin of Missionary Research, Dorothy Clark Wilson.

<sup>xviii</sup> Government Order No. 1687, dated 23 September, 1926.

<sup>xix</sup> Government Order No. 956, dated 8 June, 1926.